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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION - CHAVEZ'S CRITICISM OF CHILEAN SENATE

¶1. Summary: Last week the Senate voted to urge President Bachelet to complain at the OAS over Venezuela's decision to cancel the concession of an independent TV broadcast station. President Hugo Chavez reacted saying that Chile's Senate was "dominated by the same fascists that supported coups and ousted progressive governments in Latin America," and on April 13, President Bachelet complained to Caracas over Chavez' remarks, demanding respect for Chile's democratic institutions. Chavez responded by noting that his remarks were a criticism of the Senate and not the government. Santiago dailies ran extensive coverage of the chain of events and two major dailies ran editorials in support of Bachelet's decision to formally object to Chavez's behavior. End summary.

¶2. In conservative, independent "La Tercera" (4/14, circ. 101,000) the headline read: "President Bachelet responded harshly to Hugo Chavez's criticism of the Chilean Senate and files a complaint with Caracas." "Chile respects the decisions of other countries, especially its powers and institutions and, therefore, expects reciprocity," said Bachelet.

¶3. In conservative, influential, newspaper-of-record "El Mercurio" (4/14, circ. 173,049): President Bachelet reacted harshly to Hugo Chavez' offensive remarks about the Chilean Senate. "Chile is extraordinarily respectful of other countries and their institutions and powers," said Bachelet, in a clear message to Chavez. She said that relations between both countries must be based on friendship, "but cannot be tainted by gestures or words that in our view go in the opposite direction." Chile and Venezuela, she said, must continue to work together, but on the basis of "friendship and respect."

¶4. In "El Mercurio" (4/15, circ. 260,108): President Bachelet said that in her visit to Caracas she would personally express to Chavez the Chilean government's displeasure with Chavez's criticism of the Chilean Senate. In a brief and clear diplomatic note, the GOC demanded respect for Chile's institutions, especially its legislative power.

Chavez Reiterates Insults

¶5. "La Tercera" on 4/16 reported: The Venezuelan President apologized to President Bachelet, but intensified his criticism of the Chilean Senate. "It is an imperial, Roman or U.S. Senate," said Chavez.

¶6. El Mercurio on 4/16 stated: The GOC was not pleased with President Chavez' criticism of the Senate's decision to file a complaint in the OAS over Venezuela's decision to cancel RCTV's concession and complained to Venezuela. President Hugo Chavez apologized to Bachelet, saying he regretted it if his comments about the Chilean Senate had caused her problems. However, he reiterated

that his remarks were directed at the Senate and not the Chilean government."

Critical Editorials of Chavez

¶7. "El Mercurio" on April 14 published its editorial "Chavez and Chile":

"The GOC has reacted with an obvious protest, demanding respect for our democratic institutions.... President Bachelet has decided to not cancel her state visit to Venezuela, and by doing this has fully put on herself the load of having to tell Chavez about the consequences of his foolish actions on cooperation and friendship...in the continent."

¶8. The 4/14 editorial in "La Tercera" entitled, "Venezuelan President: Untimely Statements," endorsed President Bachelet's handling of the diplomatic flap:

"With his statements against the Chilean Senate, President Hugo Chavez added new tension to the bilateral relation.... The government did well in pointing out promptly its rejection of Chavez' remarks, emphasizing that the Senate is a democratic institution that must be respected.... Chile has expressed its desire to maintain good relations with Venezuela, but this can only be achieved if there is mutual respect and non-intervention, and President Chavez' remarks do not help accomplish this."

¶9. Alvaro Vargas Llosa wrote a 4/15 column in "La Tercera" entitled, "Memo to the President: How to visit Hugo Chavez."

"You (President Bachelet) are caught between your intimate desires and your obligations as Chief of State. What I ask is that while you are in Caracas you don't forget, not even for one moment, that you represent a country that stands for the opposite of what Chavez represents: a country that is serious, trustworthy, and with intelligent consensus."

¶10. I need not remind you that...the Chavista model failed in Latin America and that Chile is what it is because it renounced that model a long time ago.... It is also important that you keep in mind the Latin America context. The Chavista 'wave' stopped when Mexico and Peru closed their doors...and President Lula has kept a cordial relationship with Chavez, but has taken distance from him. This is evident from the strategic alliance that Brazil established with Washington on ethanol....

¶11. We have seen the problems, even domestic ones, that government's that chose to confront Chavez face.... I would therefore ask you to keep a clear distance as an independent Chilean.... We all lose some degree of freedom and democracy if Chavez is legitimized by chiefs of state who represent freedom and democracy. It is also a mistake to believe that one way to assert Chile's sovereignty is to cuddle Chavez.... When you are before Chavez and feel your defenses start to weaken... think about Argentine Norberto Ceresole... an anti-Semitic, fascist... who preached taking power in the Southern Cone through the military and who was Chavez' first political and ideological influence.... Picture Ceresole standing next to both of you and you will surely feel some disgust, which will help you maintain defenses against Chavez' flattery. Then everyone in Latin America will have won."

KELLY